

TO: Interim Committee

FROM: Cynthia Reiersen

DATE: June 13, 2016

RE: Yellowstone County Guardianship Council

I have served as a volunteer member of the Yellowstone County Guardianship Council for over 14 years. During that time, I have seen members come and members go. All of the members have had a strong commitment to supporting residents of Yellowstone County who have no one to speak on their behalf or have family members that are inappropriate to serve as guardians; (they have abused or taken advantage of their family member.)

Because we are a volunteer committee, we are unable to serve all of the people who have been referred to us. We have struggled to get new members to our committee often times because the potential member doesn't feel he/she has the requisite qualifications to serve. With the establishment of the WINGS program, the education for potential new members would be there. Currently each ward that we serve has two members assigned to him/her, the main contact and a second contact in the event the main contact is unavailable. At the present time, we train our new members by following a seasoned member with his/her wards until such time as the new member feels comfortable. Then we let the new member either take on a new ward or become the second person for a ward. At each meeting we discuss what has gone on during the last month with our wards and discuss and issues that have arisen. With a more formal training program, I believe we would be able to recruit more members and get them up to speed faster than we do right now. Mostly what is needed from a volunteer member is the desire to assist someone who has no one and to be his/her advocate. However, a more formal training program would give the potential members more confidence and a better understanding of his/her role.

I urge the Interim Committee to approve the establishment of the WINGS program and to allocate funds to it so that we can make guardianships available across Montana, not just in Yellowstone County. As we age, the need for guardianships will only increase. Let's be ahead of the curve and be ready when needed.

Cynthia L. Reiersen